



Aruba hosts the International Desalination Conference 2007

Water, the essence of life, and a dwindling resource that has now produced what is termed a “World Water Crises” is the subject of a two-day conference now taking place at the Renaissance Convention Center. Water-en Energiebedrijf Aruba, N.V. (W.E.B.) Aruba’s water and power provider, and its Director, Jossy Lacle are the official hosts to for the event, which also marks its diamond jubilee anniversary. Mr. Lacle welcomed the delegates on behalf of Aruba during the opening ceremonies on Wednesday evening, giving a brief history of Aruba’s water plants in 1932, and the establishment of W.E.B. N.V., including its evolution from a government agency to privatization in 1992.

A festive evening opened what will be two days of intensive lectures by experts in the field of seawater desalinization, which will likely be the primary source of water for future generations. The Governor of Aruba, Mr. Fredis Refunjol, and the Minister of Labor, Culture and Sport, Ramon Lee were present on behalf of Aruba and the government, with Minister Lee making a brief speech of welcome. Governor Refunjol joined Mr. Lacle in officially opening the conference by sharing a “Balashi Cocktail. (fresh water from the Balashi plants.)

The Keynote Speaker for the evening was Mr. Emilio Gabrieli, the Executive Secretary of the Global Water Partnership, (GWP) an organization founded by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Sweden in 1996. He gave a fascinating and startling presentation of the history of the development of wide scale desalinization since the late fifties with the development of the Multi Flash Evaporator by Dr. R.S. Silver of the Weir Group of Glasgow, Scotland in 1957.

Many of the technical experts present expressed there were a number of revelations in Mr. Gabrieli’s presentation of the desperate situation that the world faces in regards to potable water, and the inevitability of desalinization as a solution. In the past twenty years, the world population has doubled, but its water use has increased by *six* to what it was two decades ago. The implications of these figures are sobering, particularly as fresh water is only 2.5 % of all water on the planet, and of that, two-thirds is encased in ice caps and glaciers. Of the remaining freshwater sources, only 20% is actually available for human use, which is a scant 1/1000th of the freshwater on Earth. Humankind has further complicated matters by taking these sources for granted and freely polluting them with technological and human wastes. Thus, the preservation of resources, and development of technology for water recycling, sewage treatment and desalinization became recognized globally as an imperative, and the GWP was founded.

The GWP marked its ten-year anniversary in 2006, and its mission has remained the same since its inception, “To support countries in the sustainable management of their water resources.” During various annual World Summits on Sustainable Development, (WSSD) which began in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the “Water Crises” has grown to take a top place on the agenda. More governments and agencies recognized the dwindling of natural sources, and GWP membership has grown to include sixty countries in fourteen regional partnerships. During the Johannesburg WSSD in 2002, 193 governments agreed upon a “Plan of Implementation” regarding water management. Mr. Gabrieli’s enlightening presentation can be viewed and downloaded in Adobe PDF format at: <http://www.modares.ac.ir/ds2006/presentations/Emilio.pdf>.

Mr. Gabrieli closed his address by expressing his surprise and admiration for Aruba and W.E.B. N.V. for being pioneers regarding water desalinization, which is only reaching true globalization after fifty years. Aruba’s engineers and government have been at the forefront in developing viable and efficient methods of water production and management, which, according to a number of the experts present, produced a mark difference in the development and prosperity of the island over other Caribbean nations. The small of island Aruba is home to the third largest desalinization plant in the world, and continues to modify and move forward, quickly adapting the latest technology to produce an affordable product. Mr. Gabrieli pointed out that water is a commodity, and visionary governments are recognizing and looking forward towards its production and management. Unlike the energy obtained from the dwindling resources of fossil fuels, technology cannot develop alternative sources of water, which is essential for life, only ways to produce it economically so that it is affordable for all people.

The official opening ceremonies ended with Mr. Lacle presenting gifts to Governor Refunol, Minister Lee and Mr. Gabrieli, followed by a tour of the exposition. The gathering retired to the Fiesta Gardens of the Renaissance enjoy a show of typical Aruban music and dance with local performers Super and Masiduri Dance Troupes, Nico Conner on the steel pan, and Hilly-Ann Croes, vocalist.

The various informative exhibitions at the Renaissance Convention Center are open to the public through Friday June 22 from 9:00 AM until 4:00 P.M., and delegates will receive a tour of the Balashi plant on Saturday morning.

